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# Contentious Policies: The Experiment with Affirmative Action in Undergraduate Admissions to Public Universities

Elizabeth Notz

*Illinois Wesleyan University*

Greg Shaw, Faculty Advisor

*Illinois Wesleyan University*

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Oral Presentation O4.3

**CONTENTIOUS POLICIES: THE EXPERIMENT WITH AFFIRMATIVE ACTION IN UNDERGRADUATE ADMISSIONS TO PUBLIC UNIVERSITIES**

Elizabeth Notz and Greg Shaw\*

Department of Political Science, Illinois Wesleyan University

Affirmative action policies have polarized the American public for over a quarter of a century. With regard to undergraduate university admissions, the Department of Education has not issued a definitive policy stance and has chosen to rely upon the results of previous and forthcoming research. Most scholars have not seized the opportunity to explore the effectiveness of affirmative action on a university's minority admission or enrollment rates. Additionally, scholars have not established the role that other confounding factors, such as financial aid and academic preparation, play in determining admission or enrollment rates. This research explores the role of affirmative action policies and percentage plans in determining the admission and enrollment rate of African Americans and Hispanics at the University of California and the State University System of Florida. Results indicated that affirmative action increased the admission rates of the three disadvantaged minority groups while it decreases the enrollment rates of same groups in California. The amount of financial aid was also statistically significant when used to determine a minority group's admission or enrollment rate. In the Florida case, affirmative action was a factor in determining undergraduate admissions and enrollment rates. However, the models did not have the explanatory power of the California models. These findings have substantial implications for current public policy as the U.S. Supreme Court will consider two lawsuits against the University of Michigan and its various admissions policies.